



A Collective Messiah: Joachim of Fiore's Constitution of Future Society ***O Messias coletivo: a constituição da sociedade futura em Joaquim de Fiore***

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Resumo: No final do século XII, o famoso vidente e apocalíptico abade calabrês Joaquim de Fiore redigia a constituição para uma sociedade cristã universal que ele esperava emergir na terceira idade do Espírito. Este artigo mostra que a constituição combina uma estrutura simbólica altamente complexa com instruções concretas e pragmáticas para a vida social futura. Enquanto a estrutura simbólica equivale à imagem de um Messias coletivo, a estrutura pragmática evoca a imagem de uma sociedade estritamente hierárquica, na qual a classificação de uma pessoa depende da posse do conhecimento espiritual.

Abstract: At the end of the 12th century, the famous Calabrian abbot and apocalyptic seer Joachim of Fiore drafted a constitution for the universal Christian society he expected to emerge in a coming third age of the Spirit. This article shows that the constitution combines a highly complex symbolic structure with very concrete and pragmatic instructions for future social life. While the symbolic structure amounts to the image of a collective messiah, the pragmatic structure evokes the picture of a strictly hierarchical society, where the rank of a person depends on the possession of spiritual knowledge.

Palavras-chave: Joaquim de Fiore – *Liber Figurarum* – Futuro – Constituição – Messias.

Keywords: Joachim of Fiore – *Liber Figurarum* – Future – Constitution – Messiah.

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I. The basic idea

The so-called *Liber Figurarum* contains a collection of symbolic drawings attributed to early followers of Joachim of Fiore. The *Liber* was composed only in the 20th century by Leone Tondelli, largely based on 13th- century codices from Dresden, Oxford, and Reggio Emilia;² yet of most drawings one can safely say that they have been created from original drafts by the Calabrian abbot himself. This is especially true of the spectacular but enigmatic drawing – Tavola XII according to Tondelli's numbering – which is entitled *dispositio novi ordinis pertinens ad tertium statum ad instar supernae Jerusalem*, “the constitution of the new order of the third age according to image of the heavenly Jerusalem.”³

The figure and the accompanying texts give us a detailed idea of how Joachim imagined the society of the future. It does not present us with a utopian society, an ideal with no parallel in empirical reality, as some interpreters have wrongly assumed, but rather with a prophesied society. Today, the drawing is easily accessible on various websites. I therefore advise the reader of this text to simultaneously look at the drawing while reading.⁴

² *Liber Figurarum. Il libro delle Figure dell'abate Gioacchino da Fiore*. Edited by Leone Tondelli, Majorie Reeves, and Beatrice Hirsch-Reich. Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1953.

³ This analysis largely follows the fifth chapter of my monograph RIEDL, Matthias. *Joachim von Fiore – Denker der vollendeten Menschheit*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004, pp. 314-334. I am grateful to *Mirabilia* for the opportunity to present my research results to a non-German-speaking public.

⁴ The webpage of the Centro di Studi Gioachimiti in San Giovanni in Fiore, for instance, provides the original drawing together with an abridged Italian translation of the text: <www.centrostudigioachimiti.it/Gioacchino/GF_Tavole.asp#>, last accessed 20 March 2012. See also

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Liber_Figurarum_Tav_12.jpg?uselang=it>. An English translation of the disposition is found in MCGINN, Bernard. *Apocalyptic Spirituality. Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-Der, Joachim of Fiore, the Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1979, pp. 142-148.

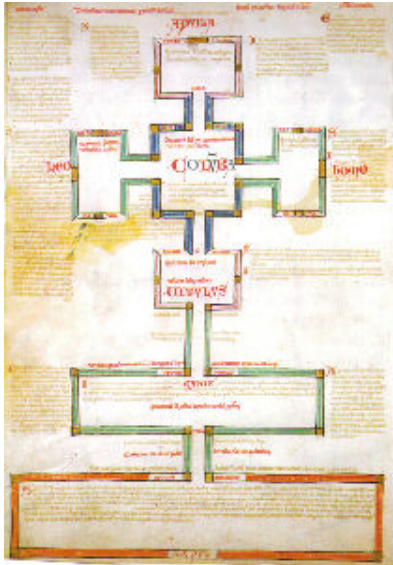


Tavola XII of the *Liber Figurarum*. In. *Gioacchino Abate di Fiore*. A cura di Mariolina Bitonti. Testi scelti da Salvatore Oliverio. San Giovanni in Fiore: Edizioni Pubblisfera, 1998, p. 61.

As is well known, Joachim of Fiore (1135? - 1202) created a new theology of history, based on the idea of a gradual self-revelation of the triune godhead.

The revelation of the Father brought about the patriarchal order of Israel, as described in the Old Testament; the revelation of the Son led to the creation of the clerical church; and, finally, the soon-to-be-expected third dispensation of the Holy Spirit would bring about the monastic *ecclesia spiritualis*. Regarding the *dispositio* of Tavola XII, there is a major question confronting us from the outset: Was the drawing meant as the constitution of a particular monastic order or of future society in general? The Latin term *ordo* can signify both. First of all, we can exclude that it was meant as the constitution of Joachim's own foundation, the Florentian Order, which was basically a continuation of Cistercian reform.

Joachim neither called the Florentians *the* order of the third age, nor did he subdivide the order into three estates as envisaged in the *dispositio*. Yet, we can also assume that Joachim had concrete monastic foundations in mind, as the *dispositio* entails instructions that agriculture and livestock farming must be adjusted to the local conditions. The pragmatic administrative structure, the instructions concerning clothing and fasting, as well as the elaborate economic regulations of the order make clear that not all elements of Joachim's constitution may be understood in a metaphorical or figurative way. This, in turn, does not rule out the possibility that Joachim's drawing represents future

society as a whole; the peculiarity of his constitution rather lies in the artful combination of the general societal idea with the local and the concrete.

Essentially, the *dispositio* represents the Corpus Christi in its final eschatological form, the spiritual church of the third age.⁵ Since the days of the Apostle Paul the term *ekklesia* referred to the universal church just as much as to the local communities. Accordingly, the universal church of the third age must also become institutionally manifest in concrete communities. Moreover, the conception also agrees with the ideas of the Gregorian Reform which heavily influenced Joachim: The *civitas Dei* is not a mystical community but the concrete and visible church of the Roman clergy; as such it is to be reformed according to the model of the early apostolic community.⁶

However, Joachim's constitution differs from the Gregorian conception in one important respect: the laics will return into the church and establish their own estate. Consequently, Joachim's constitution comprises the Christian society – which then will be a universal society – in its totality.⁷

⁵ The German Joachim-scholar Herbert Grundmann thought that the *dispositio* represents not the final form but a transitory form between the second and the third age. GRUNDMANN, Herbert. *Neue Forschungen über Joachim von Fiore*. Münster: Simons, 1950, pp. 103ff. A similar view is found in THOMPSON, A. "A reinterpretation of Joachim of Fiore's *Dispositio novi ordinis* from the *Liber Figurarum*." *Cîteaux. Commentarii Cistercienses* 22 (1982), pp. 195-205, at pp. 202ff. Yet, this view is contradicted by the title of the drawing which says *pertinens ad tercium statum*. Grundmann was irritated by the fact that the eschatological order of the *dispositio* represents an estates-based society and not an egalitarian one. But this is fully in line with Joachim's idea that even the final order in heaven will be hierarchically structured.

⁶ "E come nel cristianesimo primitivo, così nel messaggio di Gioacchino la bruciante esperienza escatologica si confonde con un'ecclesiologia concreta e realistica, a norma della quale la comunità visibile è un soprannaturale organismo carismatico, anziché un tessuto burocratico." BUONAIUTI, Ernesto. *Gioacchino da Fiore. I tempi – la vita – il messaggio*. Cosenza: Lionello Giordano, 1984, p. 201.

⁷ "In the *Dispositio novi ordinis* Joachim apparently draws a ground-plan of a settlement, even with some actual measurements, and peoples it with various types of religious men in their habits, yet the whole is much more than this: it is the ideal structure of the age in which history reaches its apotheosis." REEVES, Marjorie and HIRSCH-REICH, Beatrice. *The Figuræ of Joachim of Fiore*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1972, p. 248.

II. The symbolic structure

In the *dispositio* Joachim's thought of order achieves a density that far surpasses his other works. This he accomplishes by an almost genial superposition of several symbolical layers:

A) *The cross*. The cross is the most obvious symbol of the *dispositio*. It is modeled after a Greek altar cross, then often used for liturgical purposes. Despite the fact that the cross served as the most basic symbol of Christian architecture it is unlikely that Joachim imagined buildings exactly shaped in this figure. The symbol of the cross rather refers to Christ's act of salvation. According to a saying of the Apostle Paul, every Christian is "co-crucified" when undergoing baptism.⁸ Yet, in Joachim's conception this compassion with Christ is subject to a strict hierarchical ordering of society. The top part of the cross, the cross proper, signifies the habitations of the monks, who have most completely crucified their flesh. The pedestal signifies the oratory of the lay people, who continue the carnal procreation. The *predella*, the hollow middle part of the altar cross where the Eucharist was usually kept, signifies the oratory of the clerics. This clearly symbolizes the intermediary function of the clergy, who mediate between the spiritual monks and the carnal laics – just as the sacraments mediate between the divine and the human sphere.

The cross has yet another meaning. In the same way that it serves as the basic layout of church buildings, it determines the layout of the *dispositio*. But while even the guesthouse is explicitly mentioned in Joachim's plan, one misses any indication of a church or a chapel. The reason is that Joachim imagines the Corpus Christi of the third age as a single giant temple of God where churches will no longer be necessary.⁹ Yet, other than in Joachim's vision of the otherworldly society, the spiritual church of the this-worldly third age will still need the services of the clergy.¹⁰

B) *The city*. As indicated by its title, the drawing is modeled on the image of the heavenly Jerusalem. This image is primarily evoked by the reports in the Revelation of John. Joachim's drawing clearly displays the twelve gates, divided into threes pointing in the directions of the four winds.¹¹ Again this is not meant as an architectural instruction. If Joachim says that the spiritual church of the third age will mirror the structure of the heavenly Jerusalem in

⁸ Romans 6:2-8.

⁹ Cf. Revelation 21:22.

¹⁰ *Expositio* VIII, fols. 220^{vb}-221^{ra}.

¹¹ Cf. Revelation 21:13.

every detail this, of course, refers to its social architecture.¹² In his later works, Joachim abandoned the logic of the crusades; Christianity ought not to march on Jerusalem physically, but morally and spiritually. In the third age Jerusalem will be ubiquitous.¹³ The religious background of this idea is the monastic, especially Cistercian, use of the symbol which describes the monastery as a spiritual prefiguration of the heavenly city.¹⁴

Essentially, Joachim's is a meaningful combination of the monastic and the Pauline conception of a proleptic society, insofar as the *prolepsis*, the anticipation of the heavenly Jerusalem, occurs in the general and universal but fully monasticized church of the future.¹⁵

Joachim also uses the symbol of Jerusalem to clarify the estates-based structure of his constitution. Even though he assigns a habitation (*mansio*) in the heavenly city (*urbs*) to all three estates, only the monks constitute the citizenry proper (*civitas*). As Joachim explains in his *Psalterium Decem Chordarum*, the heavenly Jerusalem will be structured according to the achievement principle. This means that the monks, who spend most of their efforts praising God, will take the top rank.¹⁶ This conception, which so clearly privileges the monks, reminds one of the Zion Psalms in the Old Testament: God is present all over Zion, but only the citizens living within the city walls enjoy his full glory.¹⁷ Joachim's constitution implies that the spiritual church of the third age will be largely identical with the heavenly society. It only needs to be transferred into the beyond to share in eternity.

C) *Corpus Christi*. In his *Liber Concordiae* Joachim posed the question of what a perfectly ordered and differentiated Christian society would look like (*si religio Christiana perfecte esset ordinata et distincta*).¹⁸ The question emerges from a

¹² *Expositio* VIII, fol. 221^{rb}.

¹³ *Expositio* Intr., fol. 18^{va-vb}; Cf. DANIEL, E. Randolph. "Apocalyptic Conversion: The Joachite Alternative to the Crusades." In: *Joachim of Fiore in Christian Thought. Essays on the Influence of the Calabrian Prophet*. Edited by Delno West. New York: Franklin, 1975, vol. 2, pp. 310-328.

¹⁴ KONRAD, Robert. "Das himmlische und das irdische Jerusalem im mittelalterlichen Denken." In: *Speculum Historiale. Geschichte im Spiegel von Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsdeutung*. Edited by Clemens Bauer et al. Freiburg and Munich: Alber, 1965, pp. 523-540, at p. 533.

¹⁵ Cf. RIEDL, Matthias. "Living in the Future – Proleptic Existence in Religion, Politics, and Art." *International Political Anthropology* Vol. 3 (2010), n. 2, pp. 117-134.

¹⁶ *Psalterium* II, fols. 250^{vb}-251^{ra}, ed. Selge 161:16-162:14.

¹⁷ Psalm 84:11; cf. *Expositio* Intr., fol. 11^{va}.

¹⁸ *Liber Concordiae* V,22, fol. 71^{rb}.

negative diagnosis of the present. In order to see how far the modern religious congregations differ from the early church, he writes, one only needs to consider that the original Christian community united apostles, evangelists, doctors, and virgins, and even shared their common life with married lay people. “Then the body was united, now every member lives for itself.”¹⁹ This sentence nicely illustrates that Joachim takes recourse to the paradigm of the early church but, unlike the later Franciscan reformers, does not evoke the egalitarian conception of the Acts of the Apostles;²⁰ rather he refers to the differentiated conception of the church as found in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline epistles. This is confirmed by the fact that Joachim put the Corpus-Treatise of First Corinthians next to his drawings, as well as a corresponding passage from Ephesians.²¹ The most important formative principle of the coming order is Christ, the son of man, Joachim says in the *Liber Concordiae*.²²

The Epistle to the Ephesians says that Christ, by dispensing different charismata, made some apostles, others prophets and evangelists, and others pastors and teachers. Yet all of them ought to contribute to building the body of Christ, “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”²³ Joachim provides a historical interpretation of this sentence: Christ first divides the members before he brings them together in unity.²⁴

However, now, at the dawn of the third age, the time in which the norm of a particular religious congregation was tailored to a certain type of human has passed.²⁵ Now the new order of the third age will unite all *religiones*, the monastic orders, the canons regular, and the religious lay movements of the chivalric and hospital orders.²⁶ All these *religiones* will unite in the *nova religio* of the spiritual church which in its perfection will surpass all earlier times and forms of Christian community (*perfectio religionis illius ecclesie vincet aliorum omnium et temporum et ordinum religionem*) and anticipate heavenly perfection.²⁷ The plurality of ways of living will dissolve in the unifying will of all believers to

¹⁹ *Liber Concordiae* V,22, fol. 71^{va}.

²⁰ Acts 2:44ff and 4:32ff.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 and Ephesians 4:7-13.

²² *Liber Concordiae* V,18, fol. 69^{vb}.

²³ Ephesians 4:13.

²⁴ *Liber Concordiae* V,22, fol. 71^{rb-va}.

²⁵ *Liber Concordiae* V,22, fol. 71^{rb}.

²⁶ *Liber Concordiae* V,18, fol. 69^{va-vb}; cf. *Enchiridion*, ed. Burger 82:2388-2393; *Expositio Intr.*, fol. 19^{vb}.

²⁷ *Liber Concordiae* V,67, fol. 96^{va}; cf. *Liber Concordiae* V,65, fol. 95^{va-vb}.

leave the world behind. The unity of faith will anticipate heavenly like-mindedness.²⁸

D) *The charismata*. Arguably the most interesting symbol of the *dispositio* is the order of the charismata. The constitution envisages a tripartition of future society into three estates: monks, clerics, laics. Only the monastic estate is again subdivided into five oratories, each accommodating a specific type of monks. The details about these subgroups will follow below. For the moment it is important to state that Joachim's subdivisions add up to seven oratories (*oratoria*), meaning habitations of social subgroups. To every one of these oratories Joachim assigns one of seven spiritual gifts. Here, the abbot does not refer to Paul's account in First Corinthians 12:4-11, but rather to a passage from Isaiah which he connects with the order of ecclesiastic offices in Ephesians. At first glance this is somewhat surprising, as Isaiah does not speak about the community but about the coming messiah from the house of Jesse and David:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse,
and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him:
the spirit of wisdom and understanding (*spiritus sapientiae et intellectus*),
the spirit of counsel and might (*spiritus consilii et fortitudinis*),
the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (*spiritus scientiae et pietatis*).
And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord (*spiritus timoris*).²⁹

It is highly significant how Joachim applies the messianic prophecy of Isaiah to the collective of the coming spiritual church. The parousia of Christ remains rather unspecific in Joachim's writing; it is unlikely that he expected a personal Christ. The *dispositio* rather indicates that he expected Christ to return in the spiritual church of the third age, as a collective messiah. In his *Enchiridion* he writes that it is not at all absurd to call the spiritual people of the third age the anointed (*christus*) of the Lord, because of the overabundant dispensation of the spiritual gifts in this period.³⁰

The basic idea is not at all new; already Augustine taught that the parousia means nothing else than the presence of Christ in his body, the church.³¹ Yet, what has hardly been uttered before Joachim is the idea that, in the end times,

²⁸ *Enchiridion*, ed. Burger 56:1533-1536.

²⁹ Isaiah 11:1-3.

³⁰ *Enchiridion*, ed. Burger 44:1165-45:1166; cf. *Expositio* I, fol. 91^{ra}.

³¹ *De civitate Dei* XX,5.

the Holy Spirit and the manifoldness of his gifts will pour down onto a collective messiah who will establish a universal just order. For Isaiah continues his prophecy: “And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.”³²

Following the gospels, Joachim combined the symbol of the messiah with the apocalyptic symbol of the Son of Man.³³ In the *Liber Concordiae* he writes that the Son of Man does not only signify Christ, the head, but also the people of God, the body. In the same vein, he sees the messianic prophecy of Nathan not only fulfilled in Solomon and Jesus but, in its spiritual meaning (*spiritalis intellectus*), also in the coming order of the people of God at the end of times (*ordo quisdam circa finem futurus*). In these days Christ will adjust (*configurare*) his body to his majesty and make his saints partners in the judgment of the world. Just as Daniel says: when the Son of Man arrives all kingdom will be given to “the saints of the most High.”³⁴

In his *Expositio in Apocalypsim* Joachim explains that in the act of incarnation Christ’s messianic force was transmitted to mankind and is now manifest in the members of the Corpus Christi. This is spelled out in more detail in the *Enchiridion*. Here Joachim explains that the number twelve, the number of perfection, always determined the social structure of the people of God. There were twelve tribes of Israel in the first age of the Father and twelve apostolic churches in the second age of the Son. Moreover, twelve also signifies the perfection of man (*perfectio hominis*) uniting the five senses of the body with the seven gifts of the Spirit ...

... in a way that someone is less perfect who is lacking one of these: either seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching; or wisdom (*sapientia*), understanding (*intellectus*), judgment (*consilium*), courage (*fortitudo*), knowledge (*scientia*), piety (*pietas*), and fear of God (*timor*). In like manner the almighty God wishes to establish the different orders (*ordines*) in his church. Some of these, as it were, seem to engage in carnal exercises; for those the bodily sacraments have been instituted. Others rather seem to engage in spiritual exercises. The Lord, you see, gave to the church the presbyters, like ears, in order to train and educate the pupils in the doctrine of the Lord. He gave the deacons, like a mouth, in order to preach what they have heard from the presbyters. The bishops are like hands that defend [the church] against the bites of the wolves [...].

³² Isaiah 11:3-4.

³³ Mark 8:29-31; Luke 9:20-22.

³⁴ *Liber Concordiae* V,66, fols. 95^{vb}-96^{ra}, with reference to 2 Samuel 7:12ff. and Daniel 7:22.

The ascetics are like eyes; they rest while they contemplate and look out for the felicitous hope and for the advent of the glory of the great God and of our savior, our Jesus Christ. The common clergy he gave like a nose, so that they may sing the psalms and profess before the Lord. To the clergy are joined the abstinent laics as well as those who take wives, either for the purpose of procreation or because they cannot abstain from them.³⁵

Now the meaning of the sensual and charismatic capacities, which the *dispositio* assigns to the different oratories, are clarified. The symbolic order of the drawing tells us that the future spiritual church will unite, like in a single man, all the bodily senses. And this collective messiah will receive the Spirit of the Lord. In this way the five bodily functions and the seven gifts of the Spirit add up to the number twelve, the symbolic number signifying the perfection of man just as much as the perfection of human society.

E) *The cloister*. Before founding his own congregation Joachim was a Cistercian. Accordingly, the *dispositio*, just like the constitutional documents of the Cistercians, presupposes the Rule of Benedict and prescribes strict observance. Joachim clearly stands in the tradition of movements like the Clunascensians and the Cistercians, who aimed at a reform of Benedictine monasticism. He died too early to learn about the new forms of mendicant monasticism that emerged in the early 13th century. Consequently, the *dispositio* is meant as a concretization of the Rule of Benedict, adjusted to the anticipated social conditions in the third age. The text is full of references to the Rule of Benedict, often literally adapting its formulations.³⁶

Joachim once began to write a combined commentary on the Benedictine Rule and Pope Gregory's *I Life of Benedict*. The work was left unfinished but contains a highly interesting remark. Joachim says that Benedict was not only a monastic founder but also a prophet. Yet he did not prophesy through words but through institutions (*institutionibus prophetasse*).³⁷ Joachim felt able to make these prophecies more concrete because he believed he was already observing the processes fulfilling them. He believed he was continuing Benedict's method of institutional prophecy and therefore – for the first time in history – drafted his constitution exclusively in the future tense.

The term *novus ordo* in the title of the constitution combines the meanings “new social order” and “new monastic order,” because in the future the

³⁵ *Enchiridion*, ed. Burger 70:1983-2000; cf. *Expositio* Intr., fols. 16^{vb}-17^{ra}.

³⁶ To this day there is no edition of the *dispositio* which identifies these references. I have attempted this myself in my German translation of the text: RIEDL 2004, pp. 309-314.

³⁷ *Vita Benedicti* 33, ed. Baraut, p. 71:1-4.

Christian society will be one single monastic order. However, in order to make his ideas more concrete Joachim had to draft the plan for a paradigmatic cloister. Also in this respect, he stands in a long Benedictine tradition, reaching back to the 9th century, to the famous monastery plan of St. Gall. But there is an important difference: While the archetypical plan of St Gall even indicates the measures of latrines and the exact position of furniture,³⁸ Joachim's *dispositio* provides practically no architectural details. The only major exception are the instructions for the distance between the cloister proper and the oratory of the clerics (three miles) and the much shorter distance between the oratories of the clerics and the laics (three stadia).

Probably these measures must be taken literally since, according to Cistercian and Florentian ideas, a cloister should be established in inhospitable altitudes or deserted areas, far remote from the habitations of the lay people. The fact that the distance between monks and clerics is much larger than the one between clerics and laics is, of course, part of Joachim's institutional symbolism, referring to the political hierarchy of the future.

However, in one important respect Joachim's plan and the older monastery plans pursue the same goal: the (potentially universal) production of social uniformity among the monks. Joachim agrees with the principle of the Cistercian founders that only monks are to be admitted to the cloister proper, while the lay people must live in clearly distinct houses.³⁹ Yet the oratory of the lay people is not simply a lay settlement but firmly affiliated with the cloister. It seems that Joachim had the Cistercian granges in mind which were located outside the cloisters and where the *converses*, the lay affiliates of the monastery, engaged in different crafts.⁴⁰ Joachim's most important innovation to the Cistercian system is the insertion of a mediating estate of the priests which allows for the complete elimination of all human contact between the highest and the lowest estate, the monks and the laics.

F) *The names of the oratories and the animal symbols.* The names of the oratories basically clarify that the order of the third ages results from the totality of sacred history, including both earlier ages. The archetype of the lay patriarchy is Abraham who initiates the first status of the Father. Accordingly, the lay people of the third age will assemble in the oratory of

³⁸ Hecht, Konrad: *Der St. Galler Klosterplan*. Wiesbaden: VMA, 1997, pp. 102ff.

³⁹ Cf. *Exordium parvum* XV, ed. Bouton/Van Damme 78:12; *Carta caritatis* prior. *Privilegium domini papae*, ed. Bouton/Van Damme 104:7; *Capitula Cisterciensis ordinis* XVIII, ed. Bouton/Van Damme 123.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Capitula Cisterciensis ordinis* XV, ed. Bouton/Van Damme 123.

Abraham. John the Baptist is the archetype of the priestly dispensator of sacraments who initiates the second age of the Son. Accordingly, the clerics, who teach the letter of the scripture and baptize with water, will assemble in the oratory of John the Baptist.

The matter is more complex in the case of the monks who, as I mentioned earlier, are subdivided into five oratories. However, the naming of the oratories follows the same basic principle: The *novus ordo*, the spiritual church in the end times, is the result of the whole course of history and will unite all forms of religious life (*religiones*) that have emerged in the people of God. As Joachim describes it, the church of the second age fought the troops of Satan at different times in different and special forms (*ordines speciales*): the apostles fought the Jews, the martyrs fought the pagan idolaters, the doctors fought the heretics, the ascetics fought the Saracens and worldly luxury. Finally the general Roman clergy fought the Empire; and the multitude of the believers fought the multitude of the reprobates.⁴¹

Together, these special corps of the troops of Jerusalem (*milites Hierusalem*) form the citizenry of the heavenly city; they are in the proper sense the *civitas* of the otherworldly society.⁴² Therefore, they also must find their proper place in the society of third age which anticipates the heavenly order. Accordingly, the apostolic succession of *novus ordo* occurs in the oratory of Peter. This shows that the higher clergy of the third age – other than the lower clergy in the oratory of John the Baptist – is integrated into the society of the monks and will live a regulated live. However, Joachim describes them as old and weak, indicating that, in the future, the clergy is no longer the dominating class.

The successors of the martyrs, who sacrificed their body, are the monks in the oratory of Stephen the Martyr who engage in bodily labor and supply the community with bodily resources. The successors of the doctors of the second age are the teachers in the cloister school, the oratory of Paul. And, finally, the ascetics will have their successors in the strictly contemplative monks living in the oratory of John the Evangelist. Since Joachim and his contemporaries also considered him the author of the Apocalypse, he figures as the archetype of the visionary seer. A fifth oratory which is located at the center of the cloister is named after Mary and contains the government. Mary, the Mother of God, probably refers to the idea that the monks of this oratory

⁴¹ These fights are a prominent theme in Joachim's works. Short summaries are found in *Enchiridon* 88:2581-89:2625 and *Expositio* Intr., fols. 23^{vb}-24^{rb}.

⁴² *Praephatio super Apocalypsim* II, ed. Selge 121:461-463.

take care of the spiritual church as a whole. I will return to the question of governance below.

The animal symbols of the *dispositio* are taken from the heavenly visions of Ezekiel and the Revelation of John.⁴³ In the Middle Ages, the lion, the calf, the human-faced animal, and the eagle were often found on the arms of Greek crosses and symbolized the four evangelists. Joachim, in turn, interprets the four evangelists as signs for four special estates, each preaching the gospel in a particular way.⁴⁴ For understanding the political order of the *dispositio* it is important to see that Joachim introduces a hierarchy of the gospels, corresponding to the hierarchy of the respective oratories.

The biblical visions tell us that John of Patmos saw the animals sitting around the throne of God and that Ezekiel noted the direction of their view. From this information Joachim calculates the degree of knowledge contained in each gospel. The Gospel of Matthew, most strongly determined by earlier Jewish thought, is the least illuminating Gospel and corresponds to the calf and the working monks of the oratory of Stephen. The Gospel of Luke corresponds to the lion and the clerical monks in the oratory of Peter. The Gospel of Mark corresponds to the human-faced animal and the teaching monks in the oratory of Paul. The Gospel of John, containing the highest degree of knowledge, finally corresponds to the eagle and the contemplative monks in the oratory of John the Evangelist.

In this way the *dispositio* displays a hierarchy of oratories, beginning with the monks most engaged in the *vita activa*, proceeding clockwise, and arriving at the monks most engaged in the *vita contemplativa*. The symbolism perfectly illustrates the basic progressivist principle of Joachim's political thought: the later a specific social form emerges, the more it is guided by divine knowledge. The more knowledge contained in a specific social group, the more it is able to praise God adequately. The more a group contributes to the praise of the Lord, the higher it will rank in the heavenly society and its anticipation in the *novus ordo*.

Unfortunately, the visions of Ezekiel and John only speak of four oratories, while the *dispositio* envisaged seven. Therefore, Joachim must find additional animal symbols to adequately signify the other social groups. To the governing monks in the fifth oratory of Mary Mother of God, the center of

⁴³ Ezekiel 1:4-28; Revelation 4:2-11; for more details see Reeves/Hirsch-Reich 1972, pp. 232ff. and pp. 224ff.

⁴⁴ *Expositio* II, fol. 107^{vb}.

the cross-shaped cloister, he assigns a dove, symbolizing the general church and its governing principle, the Holy Spirit, who leads to theocratic perfection. The barking dog, assigned to the oratory of John the Baptist, is a conventional symbol for preachers. And finally the lay people are living under the sign of the sheep, since they will be shepherded by the higher orders of the society.

III. The pragmatic structure

Joachim's experience of progress is expressed in practically every detail of the *dispositio*. Even if he did not expect that all humans of the coming age would exactly conform to the *dispositio*, his constitution still gives us a very clear idea how he imagined future society. This is not to say that it is purely futuristic. In fact, a closer view reveals that Joachim integrated many religious developments of his own time into the arrangement of the *novus ordo*, especially the lay movements and the monastization the clergy. Like many other thinkers up to our own time he made the mistake of regarding specifically Western developments as paradigmatic for the course of universal history.

A) *Poverty and communal property*. Since Joachim's constitution presupposes the Rule of Benedict he need not emphasize that private property is strictly forbidden.⁴⁵ In the case of the laics Joachim specifically emphasizes that they, too, will receive all food and clothing out of communal property. Yet regarding the distribution of communal property there are big differences. The lower clergy of the oratory of John the Baptist may possess meat and furs. Since they also engage in agriculture – a quite realistic representation of medieval lower clergy – they possess land and livestock. The lay people dispose of the production means necessary for their crafts. If Joachim in fact refers to the model of the Cistercian granges, as suggested above, one may assume that the possessions of all three estates form part of the common property of the monastery.

B) *Uniformity*. In his treatise on the rule and life of Benedict Joachim praises the uniformity achieved by the Cistercian “doves” and complains about the uncoordinated monasticism of the Old-Benedictine “ravens,” who struggle against the progressive institution of the general chapter.⁴⁶ Since Joachim wrote the *dispositio* not only for a single monastery but, in line with Cistercian

⁴⁵ Cf. *Benedicti Regula* 33; 58:24; 59:16.

⁴⁶ *Vita Benedicti* 4, ed. Baraut 17:42-18:58.

ideas,⁴⁷ for all foundations of the *novus ordo*, he extends the monastic ideal of uniformity to the future church in its entirety. At the same time, he criticizes Greek monasticism which, because of the strict fasting rules of St. Basil, deals with the varying gifts of different humans in an undifferentiated way (*indifferenter*). The Rule of Benedict would allow for a greater monastic growth, which could include larger segments of society.⁴⁸

However, Joachim reads the Rule of Benedict in an unprecedented collectivist way. While Benedict allows for exemptions from the rule or specific achievements beyond the rule only in individual cases, Joachim relates the same passages to a whole type of monks, inhabiting one of the oratories. While Benedict wanted all monks to share in manual work as much as in prayers, Joachim's constitution envisages a highly sophisticated division of labor, considering the special gifts of each social group. This is exactly spelled out in the instructions concerning fasting and clothing.

The contemplative monks of the oratory of John the Evangelist, for instance, follow the strictest fasting rule and never wear working clothes. The working monks of the oratory of Saint Stephen, on the contrary, receive a richer diet and, instead of a robe habit, wear the more practical scapular. The instructions for the lay people appear to be generally feasible. They do not fast at all, except on Fridays in winter. Clearly, Joachim's *dispositio* is meant for the masses, as it does not expect too much from the less gifted and less determined members of the *novus ordo*. In this way, Joachim combines the social ideas of the coenobitic monks with those of the Apostle Paul. Uniformity applies to each social subgroup which, according to its specific charismatic gifts, forms one of the members of the Corpus Christi.

C) *Government*. The *dispositio* displays a highly differentiated hierarchy of command representing the estate-based structure of the constitution. In its center we find the abbot, in agreement with Rule of Benedict addressed as the spiritual father; whose commands must be followed by everyone. Joachim believes that, in the beginning of the third age, several extraordinary spiritual fathers will divert the believers from the vanity of the world and make them enter the monasteries.⁴⁹ Joachim prophesies twelve monastic founders who will rise in the beginning of the third age. According to the exegetical principle of the threefold concordance (*trina concordia*) they correspond to Joseph and

⁴⁷ Cf. EBERL, Immo. *Die Zisterzienser. Geschichte eines europäischen Ordens*. Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2002, pp. 122ff.

⁴⁸ *Liber Concordiae* V,17, fol. 69^{ra}.

⁴⁹ *Psalterium* II, fols. 270^{vb}-271^{ra}.

his brothers, the twelve tribal founders of the age of father, and to the twelve ecclesiastical founders in the second age.⁵⁰ Then Christ, the true supreme pontiff, will call twelve men as his vicars.⁵¹ This does not yet mean the end of the Roman papacy, which Joachim predicted only in his last and unfinished work, the *Tractatus super quattuor Evangelia*.⁵² Yet it makes clear that the papacy, as the top of the clerical hierarchy, will not play a leading role in the spiritual church of the future. According to Joachim's proleptic conception, the throne of God (*sedes Dei*), seen by John of Patmos in his heavenly vision, will be established in the center of the future monasteries. The spiritual fathers will sit on the thrones as the highest prelates of a theocratic order, where everything will be ordered according to the will of God.⁵³ The senile episcopate, perhaps even including the pope, will then rest in the infirmary of the cloister which, for a reason, is named the oratory of Saint Peter.

The twelve monasteries to be established by the twelve spiritual fathers are not meant as solitary foundations. Rather they are the new mother abbeys, according to the Cistercian conception, bringing forth multiple filiations.⁵⁴ Now it becomes clear why the seat of the spiritual father is called *mater omnium* and the mother Mary is its patroness. These are the "mother churches" of the spiritual church, as the text of the *dispositio* explicitly says, which will initiate a new conversion, like the one initiated by the apostles. In order to grasp the geographic dimensions implied here, one must remember Joachim's idol Bernard of Clairvaux. Under his governance, the mother abbey of Cîteaux founded more than sixty filial monasteries, in an area extending from Norway to Spain.⁵⁵

Occasionally Joachim asks himself whether the principle abbeys of the Cistercians (Cîteaux, La Ferté, Pontigny, Clairvaux, Morimond) must already be considered as the main foundations of the future church.⁵⁶ Again, Joachim

⁵⁰ *Expositio* IV, fol. 156^{ra}.

⁵¹ *Expositio* III, fol. 126^{va}.

⁵² *Tractatus* I,6, ed. Santi 97:21-100:2. The reason for this shift is probably his disappointment with the election of Pope Innocence III in 1198, a canon lawyer, who did not at all fulfill Joachim's hope for a monastic pope.

⁵³ *Liber Concordiae* V,67, fol. 96^{rb-va}.

⁵⁴ Cf. PÁSZTOR, Edith. "Architettura monastica, sistemazione urbanistica e lavoro nel *Novus Ordo* auspicato da Gioacchino da Fiore." In: *I Cisterciensi e il Lazio. Atti delle giornate di studio dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Arte dell'Università di Roma, 17-21 maggio 1977*. Edited by Istituto Nazionale d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte. Rome 1978, pp. 149-156, at p. 150^a.

⁵⁵ Eberl 2002, pp. 69ff.

⁵⁶ *Liber Concordiae* IV,36, fols. 57^{vb}-58^{ra}, ed. Daniel 411:71-413:107; *Liber Concordiae* IV,39, fol. 59^{va}, ed. Daniel 419:242-247. Joachim explicitly establishes a connection between the

prophecies by observing contemporary religious and social processes and by predicting their logical outcome. Yet the principle behind his ideas is the old plan of coenobitic monasticism, reaching back to the ancient foundations in the Egyptian desert: the bodily world shall be gradually transformed into a spiritually world, by means of monastic foundation.

According to the administrative structure of the *dispositio* the spiritual father controls the spiritual progress of the monks. He alone decides who qualifies for a step up in the hierarchy of the order; and he alone has the right to provide dispensations from certain regulations. Following the tradition of coenobitism the highest obedience is owed to the abbot who, in turn, is accountable before God for every member of the community.

Every oratory has its own prior, who executes the orders of the abbot. Not even the mystical champions in the oratory of John the Evangelist are exempted from obedience to the abbot and their prior; but they are to be treated with utmost moderation: "Their prior will not shout at them, but implore them like father or even like old men deserving mercy." For, if their meditation were disrupted, the flow of spiritual knowledge would be interrupted and damage the well-being of the whole society. Only the governance of the lay people slightly deviates from the general structure, where masters will take the place of the priors.

Ultimately, the main office of the abbot is the administration of persons and goods. In medieval diplomatics the term *dispositio* denotes the description of a law-making act. At the same time *dispositio* is the Latin translation of the Greek term *oikonomia*, since Aristotle denoting private and not public administration.⁵⁷ Accordingly Joachim writes that, at the dawn of the third age, the spiritual church will be publicly manifest throughout the whole world; yet her example will make the people flee the world and seek refuge in the monasteries or at least in the vicinity of a cloister.⁵⁸ Therefore, the third age will not only see the breakdown of all temporal rule and governance but also the dissolution of the public sphere. Governance will be restricted to the domestic administration of the spiritual fathers. Consequently strict economic rules apply.

governing monks of the oratory of Mary and the Cistercians when he says that they will follow the Cistercian fasting rule.

⁵⁷ DINZELBACHER, Peter (ed.). *Sachwörterbuch der Mediävistik*. Stuttgart: Kröner, 1992, p. 180.

⁵⁸ *Expositio* VIII, fol. 221^{rb}.

D) *Economy*. In the *Liber Concordiae* Joachim writes that the Cistercian *converses* have been created by the Lord for the support of the clerics and the monks. By fulfilling this task they earn their claim to otherworldly redemption.⁵⁹ This idea is the point of departure of Joachim's economic conception. The lay estate must take care of all the necessities troubling humans as long as they live in their mortal bodies.⁶⁰ For this purpose Joachim divides the laics into vocational groups, each presided over by their own master. Most likely he had the urban guilds in mind that were flourishing in his time, but also the Cistercian granges, from which large manufactures had emerged. Cistercian monasteries often had their own corn mills, bakeries, joineries, furnaces, hammer mills, glass and brick foundries, and so forth.

The developments of guilds and granges in the 12th century were interdependent processes. The fact that Joachim envisages a master for every craft rather points to the model of the guilds, as the granges had only one general *magister grangiae*. It also agrees with the structures of the guilds that not only male householders but whole families are integrated into the vocational groups. It is therefore not unlikely that Joachim imagined a monastization of the cities, i.e. the integration of the urban populations into the lay estate of the *novus ordo*. This has empirical grounds insofar as in the later 12th century the Cistercian granges were increasingly transferred to the cities.⁶¹

The vast production of the Cistercians order secured not only the autonomy of the monasteries but was sufficient to supply the surrounding markets.⁶² Joachim generally criticizes the economization of the Cistercian order. In his *dispositio* the production is restricted to the subsistence of the monastery; consequently trade is not mentioned. One may even ask whether Joachim imagined that in the third age, there would still be humans living outside the cloisters or the affiliated clerical and lay houses. For the structure of the oratory of Abraham, which accommodates the laics, shows that the *novus ordo* is meant to integrate the whole human society. This is manifest in a number of regulations concerning the lay people and the married ones (*coningati*) as he calls them, which often differ from the Cistercian regulations concerning the *converses*.

1) Other than the *converses*, Joachim's *coningati* do not take a vow of chastity. Most likely Joachim did not expect any human resources from outside the

⁵⁹ *Liber Concordiae* V,18, fol. 69^{va-vb}.

⁶⁰ *Liber Concordiae* V,71, fol. 100^{rb}.

⁶¹ Eberl 2002, pp. 250ff.

⁶² Eberl 2002, pp. 239ff.

novus ordo, since the *dispositio* regulates the ascension within the hierarchy of estates but not the admission of novices. Because Joachim wished to see the Cistercian ideal of autarky perfectly fulfilled, his constitution had to allow for sexual intercourse between the married lay people in order to provide for offspring. Of course, he adds that sexual intercourse is admitted for the sole purpose of procreation and not for the fulfillment of sexual desires. The couples also must agree on certain periods of chastity, devoted to prayers. It is not unlikely that Joachim's ideas were inspired by pious lay movements of the time such as the Humiliates or the Waldensians. Yet contrary to their ideas, Joachim remains totally conservative with respect to the social status of women.

In his *Expositio in Apocalypsim* he interprets John's vision of vast hosts of angels surrounding the heavenly throne of God (Rev. 5:11) as an endlessly large multitude of lay people (*infinita laicorum multitudo*) who will begin to emulate the monks in their praise of Lord.⁶³ This indicates that the laics of the *novus ordo* were meant to become a mass movement. However, since they are members of the order, though occupying a low rank, and submit to the communal life as well as to the supervision of the abbot, they are no longer mere lay people.

2) On the one hand, the work of the *coniugati* is an integral element of the economic structure of the *dispositio* and is subject to the supervision of the abbot; on the other hand, they primarily work for their own subsistence. In agreement with the principles of communal life, their products, especially food and textiles, add up to the common property of the laics and are subject to redistribution. Only a tenth of the total production must be handed over to the clerics, which indicates a relatively large independence of the laics. Also in this respect Joachim's *coniugati* differ from the Cistercian converses whose total production was transferred to the property of the monastery. Yet, the *dispositio* ultimately leaves it to the free judgment (*arbitrium*) of the abbot if he decides to apprehend and redistribute the surplus of production. The masters of the vocational groups are accountable to the abbot and responsible for a frictionless production process. Joachim even envisages a collective impeachment process against lazy members of the community which remains within the authority of the laics. The masters are entitled to apply punitive measures.

3) The lay wear modest and inconspicuous clothes but, other than the *converses*, no monastic habit. This again confirms that Joachim's constitution does not

⁶³ *Expositio* I, fol. 113^{ra}.

aim at the dissolution of the estate-based social order as many of his later Franciscan admirers asserted. Laics are still called laics and clerics are called clerics. The boundaries between the estates are strict; only the clerics have a mediating function. Joachim's monastery plan does not include the passageways for the *converses*, which allowed for a restricted access of the laics to the Cistercian monasteries; rather the laics are completely banned from the habitation of the monks.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the clerics and the laics are integrated into the theocratic order of the spiritual church. The abbot, as the deputy of God,⁶⁵ governs the entire *novus ordo*, and all estates will be obedient to him (*cui omnes ordines isti obidientes erunt*).

4) The regulation concerning tithes deserve special consideration. As has been said above, the clerics receive a tenth of the production of the laics. Yet a tenth portion of this they again pass on to the monks. This is an interesting deviation from Cistercian regulations which considered tithes to represent forbidden contact with the secular world and a violation of monastic purity.⁶⁶ Joachim could hardly avoid this deviation since he envisaged that the monks – except the working monks in the oratory of Saint Stephen – were completely exempted from all labor and devoted their life exclusively to contemplation and spiritual doctrine.

5) Another interesting feature of the *dispositio* is the instruction that the clerics in the oratory of John the Baptist must engage in agriculture. This confirms that Joachim does not speak of the higher clergy, who will be integrated into the monastic estate, but of the common priests. This again is a quite realistic element, as in Joachim's time the lower clergy often depended on a second income from small scale farming.⁶⁷

Despite the complexity of this economic constitution, it belongs solely to the sphere of necessity. For Joachim, the true goal of human life is the liberty from bodily necessities. Consequently, the highest perfection is found only in the contemplative monks of the oratory of John the Evangelist who, except in emergency situations, never work and separate from the rest of the society to the greatest extent possible. Not unlike the contemporary Carthusians,

⁶⁴ Cf. *Expositio* II, fol. 112^{vb}.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Benedicti Regula* 2,2; 63,13.

⁶⁶ *Capitula Cisterciensis ordinis* XXIII, ed. Bouton/Van Damme 124.

⁶⁷ TELLENBACH, Gerd. *Die westliche Kirche vom 10. bis zum frühen 12. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988, p. 82.

Joachim's constitution tries to accomplish a seemingly paradoxical task: the integration of hermits into society.⁶⁸

F) *Education*. The system of education finally reveals what the *dispositio* really is about and therefore aptly concludes my evaluation of Joachim's social and political vision. It presents us with a hierarchically structured society of knowledge, mirroring the whole course of human, which Joachim describes as the gradual divine re-education of mankind after the fall.⁶⁹ In the oratory of the lay people we hear explicitly only about the education of girls. All female members of the *novus ordo* are destined to ever remain in the lay estate.⁷⁰ Therefore, they must primarily be trained in the fear of God, just like the Israelites, the people of God in the first age of the Father. Furthermore, it may be assumed that vocational groups, based on the model of the guilds, are responsible for training in the crafts. The laics neither learn to read nor to write.⁷¹ All they need to know for their salvation they will learn from the priests who descend to the lay oratory to celebrate the mass.

The boys who prove suitable for higher education attend the elementary school of the priests. In agreement with the education of the people of God in the second age of the Son, they learn about doctrine (*doctrina*). This doctrine, however, is still restricted to the teaching of the letter. Consequently, they study grammar, especially in Latin, the language of the Vulgate. Literature other than the Bible is not mentioned. If their talents allow it, the boys should learn to recite the whole Bible by heart and, thereby, prove their readiness for receiving the spiritual doctrine. This *doctrina spiritualis* is transmitted exclusively within the monastic estate and agrees with the future education of man in the coming third age of the Holy Spirit. In the oratory of Paul we find a higher school which completes the education of the contemplative monks. Again,

⁶⁸ Bruno of Cologne once founded the second largest chartreuse in Joachim's Calabrian home country. Even more interesting is the fact that, in 1193 and about the time when Joachim drafted the *dispositio*, the Calabrian chartreuse was integrated into the Cistercian order. In other words, there is a tangible model for the oratory of John the Evangelist. HOGG, James Lester. "Kartäuser." In: *Kulturgeschichte der Orden in Einzeldarstellungen*. Edited by Dinzelbacher, Peter and James Lester Hogg. Stuttgart: Kröner, 1997, pp. 275-296, at p. 276.

⁶⁹ *Praephatio super Apocalypsim* I, ed. Selge 102:16-19.

⁷⁰ Considering the earlier assessment that the *dispositio* may be seen as a prophetically anticipated synthesis of all contemporary religious movements, Joachim's ignorance of female monasticism is most conspicuous.

⁷¹ Cf. *Liber Concordiae* V,71, fol. 100^{rb}.

this coincides with the Cistercian image of the monastery as an auditory of the Holy Spirit.⁷²

Yet the *dispositio* may also be read the other way round, following the knowledge of how it descends through the estates of the hierarchy. The highest insight into divine reality is given to the perfect men (*virī perfecti*) in the oratory of John the Evangelist. They live like hermits in single cells and wish to continually remain in a meditative state. However, they must use their knowledge for the service of the community and therefore live in the immediate environment of the cloister. Their insights and prayers serve not only the government of the abbot but also the monks of the other oratories.

The clerics, who occasionally are allowed to enter the monastery for their spiritual enlightenment, take some of these contemplative insights with them and transmit it to the lay people when they give their sermons. In the society of knowledge that the *novus ordo* represents we find the basic forms of knowledge acquisition that Joachim had outlined in his book *Psalterium decem chordarum*. The gifted males may work their way up through the system of education and proceed from figurative representations to the letter of the Bible and, finally, to immediate spiritual understanding. The *intelligentia spiritualis*, in turn, flows down the hierarchy of knowledge and, in different degrees, serves the understanding of all three estates.

In conclusion: Despite the fact that Joachim does not challenge the estate-based order of medieval society, his prophetic constitution is full of innovations, most importantly the monastic ruling class. Moreover, in the structural principle of the constitution we may sense the spirit of modernity. In the coming age of the Spirit, the measure of knowledge given to a man will determine his rank in society. And the most progressive class will govern the others.

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